Mrs. Rella F. Yeager

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"THE PATHFINDER OF THE SEAS"

Americans have not always acknowledged the greatness of their fellowmen. This has been characteristic of the Nation. While there are occasional movements toward recogintion of the public services of some distinguished son of the Republic, there are still many who today are practically unknown by the American People. This is unfortunately true of one whom all Europe proclaimed as the "greatest American of his times" but who is not familiar to his own ountrymen.

It is therefore our privilege to give the first national record in an American Historical Journal of Commander Matthew Fontaine Maury, the American who charted the winds and the currents of the Oceans; who gave to the world the new science of meteorology; who is in reality the father of the National Observatory at the seat of our National Government and who originated the great system today is known as the Weather bureau.

There is no American whose service to his generation was so great and whose life at home was spent in such seclusion; about him there was the modesty of greatness, for as an American he refused the highest scientific honors of Europe and renounced wealth, fame and even a palace as the gift of an emperor, to pass his last days in the hills of Virginia that he loved. Our beloved West Virginia shares this honor with Virginia, the Mother State.

A friend of kings, he passed away in the beautiful little town of Lexington, Virginia, within the shadow of the graves of Robert E. Lee and General Stonewall Jackson. Through the Journal of American History the life and character of this great American has just been completed.

The investigator is an authority in southern history who is intimately acquainted with those among whom Commander Matthew Fontaine Maury spent his life, and from private historical sources has prepared this record.

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Though this investigation a movement has also been made for the erection of a monument to the great American, with an appropriation from the Congress of the government that he so well served.

With the beginning of the past century, on the 14th of January, 1806, only ten miles from the city of Fredericksburg in the County of Sporrsylvania, Virginia, was born Matthew Fontaine Maury. He came of goodly stock, for there mingled in his nature, in equal parts, the sturdy religious life of the French Huguenots and the gallantry of the English Cavalier. On his mothers side he belonged to the distinguished Miner family of Virginia, while his name bears testimony that his paternal ancestors were of the choice Huguenots who, from the persecutions of Catholic France stretched their arms to the new world.

When Maury was only five years old, his parents went to Tennessee and settled near the present town of Franklin. There 'mid the forests of Tennessee in the days of the early settlers, before advanced civilization had built her great highways of travel or her schools of learning, there grew up the lad who was to become the "Pathfinder of the Sea".

Few were the early educational advantages of young Maury, but an accident in his youth that seemed to disqualify him for farm life, led his father to give him an opportunity at Harpeth Academy.

The activity of his mind brought him into the special notice of his instructors and the association ripened into life long friendship.

J. H. Otey, afterward Bishop of Tennessee, and William C. Hasbrouck, to whom Maury dedicated his work on "The Physical Geography of the Sea" were his teachers at the Academy. Maury's ambition was for a course at West Point but his parents denied this to him. Young Maury left home without his father's blessing, for without their knowledge he sought an appointment in the Navy. In 1825 an inland lad of 19 years, Matthew Maury received his appointment to the United States Navy, and was assigned as midshipman on the frigate "Brandywine".

There was no Naval Academy, for it was Maury himself who first advocated the establishment of the great government school at Anapolis.

This young aspirant for Naval honors, must needs prosecute his studies amid the trying scenes of active sea service. It at once became evident that Maury had resolved to master both the theory and practive of his profession.

His conrades of that early peroid relate that on the round spot of the quarter-deck, he chalked his diagrams in spherical trigonometry to enable him, when on duty pacing to and fro, to employ the precious moments in useful study. It chanced that during the first year of his service, the "Brandywine" bore LaFayette from his visit to this country.

Tradition tells us that the distinguished Marquis spoke many pleasant and encouraging words to the studious midshipman. In 1826, Maury was transferred to the sloop-of-war "Vinciennes"--about to make a cruise around the world. The opportunities for study on this voyage were much to his advantage, and on his return home, he was ready for his examinations.

In 1831, he was appointed master of the sloop-of war Falmouth" which had been ordered to Pacific waters. He at once sought diligently for information as to the best track for his vessel, but no reliable charts for his guidance were in existence. He keenly realized that here was a great need to be supplied and his hold and active brain forthwith began to grapple with the problem of ocean charts.

On this vogage he observed the curious phenomenon of the low barometer off Cape Horn, and wrote upon the subject his first scientific paper and it was at this time that he began his textbook on navigation.

At his home for a time in 1834, two important events occurred. He was married to Miss Anna Herndon of Fredericksburg, Virginia. From this time on we find much of his time and life woven into the history of the old 'Burg on the Rappahannock. The other event that marked this year at home, was the publication of his first book, a treatise on navigation, which became for many years a text book in the United States Navy, and was in every essential particular outlined by Matthew Maury.

He saw it as a vision from heaven with blessings to earth, and he failed not to prophesy to his people. It was on his return from the Brussels Conference to his post at Washington, laden with honors that Maury stood clearly before the world,

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"the founder of the twin sciences of hydrography and meteorology". No less a man than Alexander Van Humbolt declared him the "father of a new science", and was distinguished Daron in his 90th year wrote him a fervid letter of congratulation.

The simple De hot pot of charts and instruments entrusted to the young lieutenant became a National Observatory, with the great man of science as its superintendent. In all particulars this National Observatory under Maury, outlined and comprehended, what now at Washington is divided into four separate departments. Science has conferred no greater boon upon the world than the great ocean cables, that flash the news. It was the genius of Commander Maury that from all this dry data brought forth, those scientific deductions that revolutionized the ship sailing of the world. This took form in a series of six charts and eight large folio volumes of "Sailing Direction", that comprehended all waters in every clime where fly the white sails of civilized commerce. The charts are known as "Maury's wind and currents chart", and are styled "Track Charts," "Thermal Charts," and "Storm and Rain Charts." They exhibit with wonderful accuracy, the winds and currents, their force and direction at different seasons of the year, the temperature of the service waters, the calm belts and trade winds, the rains and the storms.

The eight volumes are of "Sailing Directions" and are brim full of the most valuable nautical information, and are treasures to every intelligent seaman. With these charts and directions, the navigator knows for each season, and in all waters where he has best chances for a swift and safe voyage. Some idea of the work accomplished can be formed from the statement that 20,000 copies of "Sailing Directions" were distributed gratuitously to the merchant vessels.

The practical result to the navigator of the revelations of this great "Pathfinder of the Sea" has been that in the most difficult of all sea-voyages, that from New York to San-Francisco, around Cape Horn, the trip has been shortened by forty days, and it has been estimated that in shortening the time and lessening the dangers of sea-voyage there has been a saving to the world's commerce of not less than $40,000,000 annually.

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The accuracy of Maury's work was shown when on one occasion, the "San Francisco" with troops on board was severely damaged in an Atlantic hurricane. The helpless wreck drifted out to the sea.

The Secretary of the Navy appealed to Maury, who estimated where wind and wave acting upon a helpless wreck, would drift the vessel. With a blue pencil he marked the spot on his chart. To this spot relief was sent, and the survivors rescued.

In his "Physical Geography of the Sea", in his discussion of "Sea Routes", Maury has this to say: "So to shape the course on voyages as to make the most of winds and currents at sea, is the navigator's art. How the winds blow and the currents flow along this route is no longer a matter of opinion or subject of speculation, but a matter of certainty determined by actual observation. The winds and the weather daily encountered by hundreds who have sailed on the same voyage before him and 'the distance made good' by each from day to day, have been tabulated and arranged for the mariner; nay, his path has been literally blazed through the winds for him on the sea; mile posts have been set up on the waves, and finger-boards planted, and time tables furnished for the trackless waste."

The international character of the work soon led to an international conference. It was at Maury's instance that in 1853 the United States called the celebrated Brussels Conference. It was a notable gathering of scientific men. Nearly every important maritime nation was there represented and a systematic plan of co-operation provided. It was at this conference that Maury advocated the extension of the same system of meteorological observations to land also and thus form a weather bureau, helpful to agriculture. This he continued to urge and agitate in his papers and addresses all over the country until the very close of his life. The great Signal Service and Weather Bureau, successfully operated in the world today from continent to continent and for this the debt is due to Maury, for the great Atlantic cable is one of the radiant sparks that flew from his anvil as he wrought.

The Physical Geography of the Sea and its meteorology he founded the way to the very heart of nature and land before us her majestic laws.

Master of a pure English style he sets before us the marvelous phenomena of earth and sea.

Master of a pure English style he sets before the marvelous phenomena of earth and sea and air, in thought and language that flows deep and strong, and warm and life giving like the great current of the Gulf Stream.

No American has ever received higher testimonials from foreign contries; Orders of Knighthood were bestowed upon him by the Emperor of Russia, King of Denmark, King of Portugal, King of Belgium and Emperor of France, while other countries struck gold medals in his honor. The Pope sent him a full set of all the medals struck during his pontificate and Masimilian decorated him with the "Crest of our Lady Gaudalopue". By special request Alexander Von Humbolt bestowed upon him the "Cosmos Medal", struck in honor of the great Baron. It is the only duplicate of that medal in existence.

The Cambridge University of England conferred on him the degree of L.L.D. It is said that in Berlin there stands a statue to his memory. Thus Kings, to do him honor, took delight. The only civilized nation that has withheld adequate recognition of his services has been the government of the United States. All that has come to him from his own government has been the meager pay of his rank in the Navy.

In the Capital City where for twenty years his great brain projected influence that are blessing the whole civilized world today, and are the very honor and glory of our own land, there stands no memorial of his service, no bronze or marble to tell of his greatness. There is not even a bust nor a portrait in the National Observatory where his work was done.

When this nation built its National Library, from all nations and all ages were brought names through worthy to be woven into the beautiful Mosaic of that national structure, but while the antiquarian dug deep to find some of the names that are there, we look in vain for that of him who, born on our native soil and toiling under the very shadow of the Capitol, became the founder of twin sciences

that amaze the mind with their wonders and shed light and blessings to the ends of the earth.

The claims of Maury for recognition at the hands of this nation do not rest upon Military service, or any relation he bore, or did not bear that brought us into war. It rests upon a service that saves live and property, a service that is one of the brightest stars that adorn the victories of peace.

Maury is one of the greatest names that adorns the history of Virginia. Do not think the name of Maury is forgotten in his own land. It is too closely woven into his great science ever to be lost to the world.

The Congress of Meteorology must render to the name of Maury a tribute of profound gratitude, as the founder of our science and the highest honor for his great researches in every department of this science.